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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by the American Association of Retired Persons, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) strongly urges the Commission for Social Development to explore concomitantly the theme of the International Year for Older Persons (1999), "Towards a society for all ages" and the theme of social integration, in follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development.

The definition of "social integration" is the act, or process of, integrating equals into society. A "society for all ages" would include individuals of all ages as participants in society. Reality tells us that this vision will be hard to achieve.

One aspect of the realities of the future is changing demographics: the large increase in the numbers of older people, many not only living longer but healthier lives. The challenge to all nations will be to look to the future and to identify potential opportunities for the participation and integration of these legions of older people. They will either contribute to the social and economic well-being of all ages, because they participate and are integrated, or they will be seen as burdens upon society — a result no nation or society can afford.

Social integration, besides building a society for all ages, will require the eradication of current stereotypes — not only of age, but race, gender and religion, or belief. In the

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development of social and economic policies, the voices of all must be heard. Opportunities for financial and economic self-sufficiency must be equally accessible to all. Thus can we achieve social integration and build a society for all ages.

The focus of this session, social integration, and the approach of the International Year of Older Persons, with their common but not identical themes, presents a unique opportunity for the Commission to contribute to the framing of the debate on what is a "society for all ages" as it further defines social integration.

As a contribution to that debate, the American Association of Retired Persons is collaborating with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in a worldwide poster competition for the year 1999, in which artists will portray their vision of a "society for all ages".

AARP hopes that the Commission, in its deliberations about social integration, will focus on the reality of changing demographics and will contribute in large measure to the framing of the vision of a "society for all ages". Integration without participation is not possible.